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CIA choice

Turner's nomination evokes mixed feelings

President Carter's choice of Admiral Stansfield Turner to head the Central Intelligence Agency evokes decidedly mixed feelings.

Turner, a classmate of the president's at the U.S. Naval Academy, has a reputation as a scholar, as well as a progressive military thinker. Both attributes will stand him in good stead as director of America's quasi-military intelligence agency. He also apparently has few detractors in the Congress, and is therefore likely to be swiftly confirmed.

Military direction of the CIA will be disquieting to those who object to the CIA's involvement in activities having nothing to do with the gathering of intelligence, and its close relationship with the president will disturb those who were alarmed by President Nixon's cynical use of the CIA in the Watergate affair. We are concerned on both counts.

However, Admiral Turner's reputation as a thoughtful, scholarly innovator at the Naval War College, where he chopped away at pomp and polish and encouraged intellectual dissent and inquiry, offers another and encouraging dimension to the man. Moreover, if he is determined to hold tight reins on the CIA, his impeccable military credentials will shield him from criticism that would surely beat a steady tattoo against a civilian director.

Any CIA director must be accepted with a large ration of faith that he will be guided by concern for the Constitution and a willingness to honor the charter under which the CIA operates. Too often, the CIA has seemed to believe it could ignore the Constitution and could regard the charter limiting the scope of its activities as a meaningless scrap of paper. It would be in the nation's best interests if Turner proves to be a man of a different stripe.